

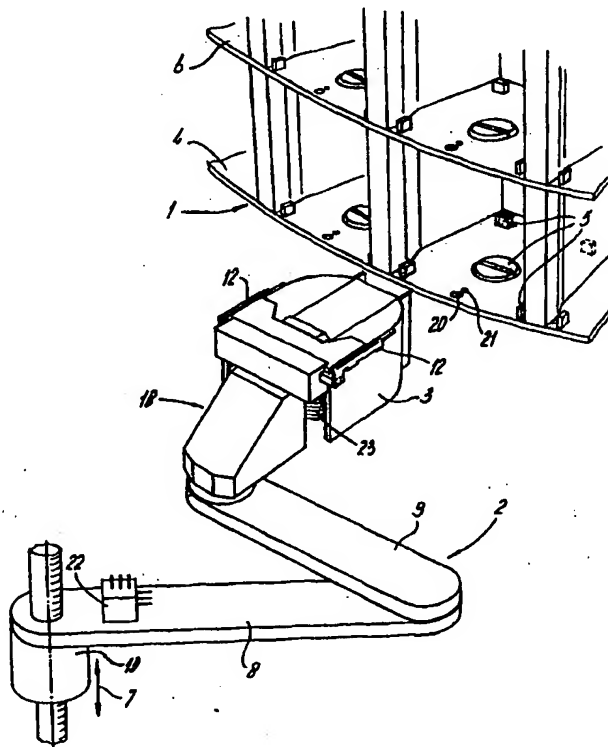
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INTERNATIONAL APPLICATION PUBLISHED UNDER THE PATENT COOPERATION TREATY (PCT)

(51) International Patent Classification ⁶ : H01L 21/00		A1	(11) International Publication Number: WO 99/01894
			(43) International Publication Date: 14 January 1999 (14.01.99)
(21) International Application Number: PCT/NL98/00383		(81) Designated States: AL, AM, AT, AU, AZ, BA, BB, BG, BR, BY, CA, CH, CN, CU, CZ, DE, DK, EE, ES, FI, GB, GE, GH, GM, GW, HR, HU, ID, IL, IS, JP, KE, KG, KP, KR, KZ, LC, LK, LR, LS, LT, LU, LV, MD, MG, MK, MN, MW, MX, NO, NZ, PL, PT, RO, RU, SD, SE, SG, SI, SK, SL, TJ, TM, TR, TT, UA, UG, US, UZ, VN, YU, ZW, ARIPO patent (GH, GM, KE, LS, MW, SD, SZ, UG, ZW), Eurasian patent (AM, AZ, BY, KG, KZ, MD, RU, TJ, TM), European patent (AT, BE, CH, CY, DE, DK, ES, FI, FR, GB, GR, IE, IT, LU, MC, NL, PT, SE), OAPI patent (BF, BJ, CF, CG, CI, CM, GA, GN, ML, MR, NE, SN, TD, TG).	
(22) International Filing Date: 3 July 1998 (03.07.98)			
(30) Priority Data: 1006461 3 July 1997 (03.07.97) NL			
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(54) Title: STORAGE ASSEMBLY FOR WAFERS**(57) Abstract**

Storage assembly provided with a robot for placing cassettes, which are filled with wafers, in a carousel, comprising a number of magazines. These magazines lie both above one another and next to one another. In order to be able to determine the correct position of the head of the robot which holds the cassettes with respect to the magazines, it is proposed to provide sensor means which determine the vertical position of the head with respect to the base plate of the magazines and sensor means for determining the horizontal position of the head with respect to the magazines. This horizontal position is determined using openings arranged in the base plate of the magazines. In particular, a main opening and an auxiliary opening are present.



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Storage assembly for wafers

The present invention relates to a storage according to the preamble of claim 1.

A storage assembly of this kind is generally known in the prior art. Due to the continually increasing miniaturization and the increasing number of magazines, in practice it is unrealistic to have such magazines filled by an operator. Moreover, the associated costs are too high. For this reason, it is proposed in the prior art to move such cassettes with the aid of a robot. These cassettes may optionally be filled with wafers which are subjected to some form of treatment. In some devices, a robot of this kind is situated in a chamber which is filled with a particular gas, so that there is no longer any possibility of positioning them manually.

Hitherto, automatic positioning has been carried out by manually instructing the movement of the robot and storing the associated position data, i.e. the position of the robot with respect to the magazine, which is designed as a carousel. In this case, it was necessary to repeat this process after any possible disruption to the mutual position of robot and magazine, i.e. to reinput the relative positions. The position-determining means in the magazine did at least allow the cassettes to be arranged at an accurately defined position in the magazine. This is important for further processing and for allowing the wafers to be removed from the magazine accurately. Such disruption to the mutual position of the magazine and the robot takes place at any rate during initial assembly. For if a storage assembly of this kind is set with respect to one another during production, after trial runs the structure will be dismantled and reassembled at the ultimate place of use. If displacements occur in drive motors and the like during operation, it will be necessary to partially dismantle the device, with the result that the mutual position is likewise altered and resetting is required. A change in height can occur as a result of the base plate becoming warped, play which occurs during use and bending under the weight of the cassette in question, if the said cassette is full.

In particular if the number of magazines is relatively great, a setting operation of this kind is time-consuming, while in many cases the operator cannot easily gain access to the various stations, owing to lack of space. Moreover, a particularly accurate control system is required and it is necessary for the various components of the robot and also the

rotating part of the carousel to be designed with particularly low tolerance. This is because after setting errors can no longer be corrected.

The object of the present invention is to avoid the
5 disadvantages described above and to provide a storage assembly in which it is no longer necessary to carry out the complicated instruction of the robot with regard to positioning the cassettes accurately and in which it is not necessary to reinput the data manually after a disruption to the mutual positions of the various components, and in which, moreover,
10 slight tolerances between the various moving parts are acceptable.

This object is achieved with a storage assembly described above having the characterising features of claim 1. As a result of using sensor means and interacting reference means, each time a cassette is put in position the robot rechecks the extent to which the position of robot
15 and magazine with respect to one another is correct. Then, any required correction is carried out. This takes place completely automatically. As a result, slight tolerances which occur during operation will have no effect on the operation, since the storage assembly according to the invention is self-teaching. Moreover, the stop position of the carousel
20 is no longer critical and deviations are corrected automatically.

Sensor means may be present for determining the vertical position. These may be simple scanning sensors. The associated control system may, for example, be designed in such a way that after the initial contact between the relevant sensor means for determining the height and,
25 for example, the base plate of the relevant compartment of the magazine, the device still moves a fixed distance downwards, in order to reach the correct position involved.

To determine the position in the horizontal direction, it is possible to use simple contact means or contactless means which determine
30 the edge of the carousel. However, these do not allow an xy-position to be determined. Consequently it is necessary to know the position of a fixed point on the base plate. It is thus possible to arrange an opening or some other reference means in the base plate at a fixed position with respect to the position-determining projections for the cassette. If the
35 sensor means on the head of the robot detect these reference means and direct themselves towards them, the correct position for putting down or picking up the cassette will then be reached automatically by moving a fixed distance.

This detectability of the reference means can be increased by

providing auxiliary reference means. These cover a larger area, and as soon as the sensor means of the head are situated within this field, they can search for a fixed position with respect to the auxiliary reference means and, starting from this position, can find the main reference means described above. On this basis, the position for picking up or putting down the cassette in question can again be found.

According to a preferred embodiment, the above-described reference means for determining the horizontal position comprise an opening, while the sensor means comprise light-sensitive means. Light-sensitive means of this kind can determine whether or not light is incident through an opening of this kind without further contact being required. This light may comprise any light which is known in the prior art. It may be generated using conventional optical means, but it is also possible to use a laser beam.

If main and auxiliary reference means are used, in the case in which these means are designed as openings, the opening of the auxiliary reference means will be considerably larger than that of the main reference means. One example of such a diameter is 5 and 2 mm, respectively. The accuracy of the head with respect to the carousel must in all cases be + or - 2.5 mm. On this assumption, the light beam emanating from the sensor means strikes a boundary edge of the auxiliary reference means. By then carrying out a return movement, or some other movement, another edge of the opening of the auxiliary reference means is struck. By carrying out these reciprocating movements a number of times, it is possible to find the centre of the relevant opening of the auxiliary reference means in question. Then, the movement can be continued until the main reference means, i.e. the opening with the smaller diameter, is found, and then the position with respect to the cassette to be removed or the position-determining projections for positioning the cassette is established.

The above-described robot may comprise any structure which is known in the prior art. However, it preferably comprises a swivelling arm structure with the head arranged at one end and with the other end being height adjustable.

The invention will be explained in more detail below with reference to an exemplary embodiment depicted in the drawing, in which:

Fig. 1 shows a diagrammatic, perspective view of the storage assembly according to the invention, and

Fig. 2 shows a more detailed side view of the robot according

to the invention.

In Fig. 1, 1 denotes a magazine. In this case, it comprises a carousel which delimits a number of compartments. Each of the compartments has a base plate 4 or 6, on which cassettes 3 are placed.

5 The correct position of the cassettes is ensured by means of the position-determining projections 5 on the base plate. These projections are dimensioned in such a way that an H-shaped projection on the underside of the cassette is accurately positioned, as is customary with structures of this nature.

10 The robot according to the invention is denoted by 2. This robot comprises two arms 8, 9, which are arranged pivotably with respect to one another and on which a plate 10 is arranged at one end, which plate, in addition to the rotating movement, can also execute an upwards/downwards movement in the direction of arrow 7. Moreover, arm 9
15 is provided with a base plate, to which head 18 is attached. A robot of this kind is generally known in the prior art, and details of the control unit and means which enable the various arms to move with respect to one another will not be described here. A clamping mechanism, comprising clamping bars 12, is arranged on the head in order to be able to grip the
20 cassette. After having been gripped in this way, the cassette can be moved. In a manner which is not shown in more detail, the cassettes may be filled with wafers 23. As can be seen from Fig. 2, head 18 is provided with a spring-loaded height switch 17 and light-sensitive sensor means 13-15 which lie next to it (in the horizontal direction). These sensor
25 means comprise a light source 13, in which another sensor is integrated. 15 denotes a fibre-optic component and 14 denotes a lens. With a device of this kind, it is possible to detect whether or not a light beam emanating from lens 14 is reflected.

16 denotes two rods which are used, if necessary, to push
30 wafers further into the cassette when head 18 moves towards the cassette.

A control unit is diagrammatically depicted at 22. The signals emanating from the sensor means 13-15 and 17 are fed to the control unit. The control unit is also fed with signals relating to the position of the head 18 with respect to component 10 as well as the height of component
35 10 with respect to a reference plane. On the basis of these signals, the movement of the head 18 is controlled in a manner which is not illustrated in more detail.

Both base plate 4 and base plate 6 are provided in each compartment with a main opening 21 of relatively small diameter (for

example 2 mm) and an auxiliary opening 20 of relatively large diameter (for example 5 mm). These openings are always situated at an accurately determined, fixed position with respect to the position-determining projections 5.

5 The device described above operates as follows.

 If head 18 provided with a cassette possibly from another magazine or arranged in some other way between clamping bars 12, which cassette is to be placed in a compartment of the carousel 1, the first part of the movement of head 18 with respect to the compartment in
10 question will be carried out on the basis of a basic routine stored in control unit 22, which if appropriate is assisted manually. This results in a first, very approximate movement of the head with respect to the compartment. This movement is such that the cassette which is later to be put in position is never moved too far, too high or too low into the
15 compartment, which could result in possible damage or undesirable contact.

 After it has reached the first, approximate position, head 18, together with the arms 8 and 9, is moved downwards until switch 17 reaches either base plate 6 or base plate 4. As a result, component 17
20 moves upwards and, in a manner which is not shown in more detail, interrupts a light beam, with the result that a signal is transmitted. When the first signal is received, it is known where head 18 is situated vertically with respect to the compartment in question, and then a fixed upwards travel of, for example, 15 mm is covered. It is then necessary to
25 establish the horizontal position of head 18, in order to enable accurate positioning of the relevant cassette 3, which is not present during calibration, in the position-determining projections 5. For this purpose, in the first instance use is made of the auxiliary opening 20.

 Since the accuracy of the head during assembly/dismantling or
30 other irregularities will never deviate by more than approximately 2.5 mm, the auxiliary opening 20 is designed with a diameter of 5 mm. During the sensing movement of head 18, the light beam emanating from sensor 13-15 will detect the circumferential edge of opening 20 at a predetermined moment. Then, the head carries out an approximating
35 movement, i.e. moves in various perpendicular directions in order to determine the centre of opening 20. After this position has been determined, head 18 can move onwards and meets the smaller opening 21 (diameter approximately 2 mm). It is possible that the approximating movement as at opening 20 is realised to determine the centre of opening

21. Then, the position of the head with respect to the compartment in question is established and subsequently, when the head has been loaded with a cassette, the cassette can be positioned accurately. In this case, the position is always checked on the basis of the opening of small diameter, i.e. opening 21. The size of this opening may be less than 2 mm, for example 0.5 mm.

In addition to the sensors described above, it is possible for sensors to be arranged in the clamping mechanism for the cassette. These sensors are activated when the cassette has been gripped in its entirety by the clamping bars 12. If any irregularity occurs, picking up or putting down a cassette will be interrupted and an alarm signal will be given.

The positions registered by the head, and in particular by the sensors arranged therein, are stored in the memory. This means that comparatively slow, albeit automated, searching for the correct position of the cassette with respect to the relevant magazine will take place only in the event of disruption to the various components with respect to one another. Then, such an operation will be carried out considerably more quickly.

Although the invention has been described above with reference to a preferred embodiment, it will be understood that numerous variants may be applied without departing from the scope of the present application. Such variants will be obvious to the person skilled in the art on reading the description and lie within the scope of the claims. For example it is possible to arrange the sensor means in any other suitable position such as the top of head 18. The magazine will be provided with cooperating means on a corresponding location.

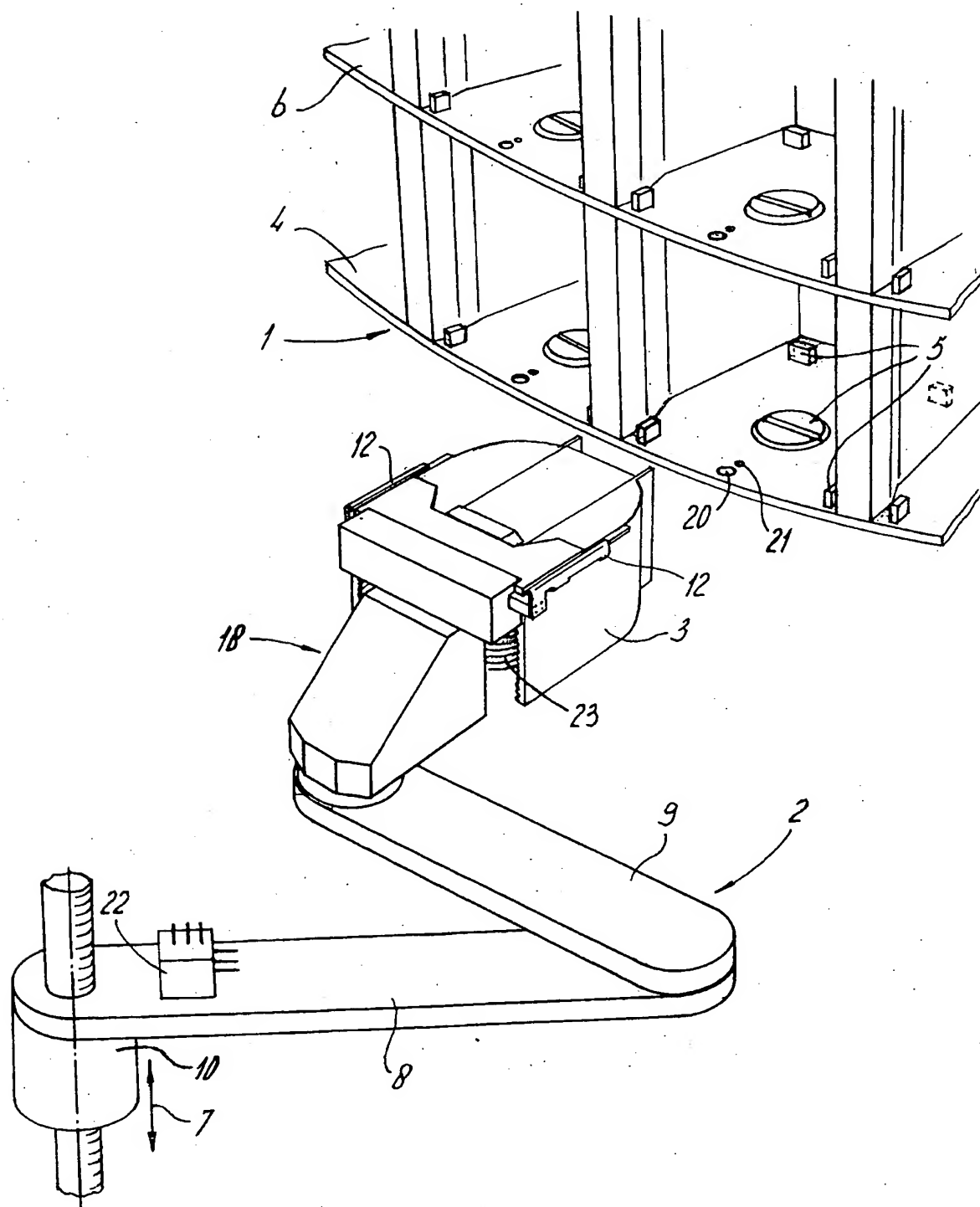
CLAIMS

1. Storage assembly comprising a magazine (2) with a carousel (1), which rotates about an essentially vertical axis and is provided with compartments arranged at different heights for receiving cassettes (3),
5 each compartment comprising a base plate (4, 6) provided with means (5) for establishing the position of the cassettes, as well as a device (2) for placing cassettes in the said compartments, said device being height adjustable and can be positioned in the horizontal plane and is provided with a head (18) for gripping said cassettes, characterized in that the
10 head (18) of said device is provided with sensor means (13-15; 17) for determining the vertical position with respect to the magazine as well as the horizontal position thereof, reference means (20, 21), which interact with the sensor means for the purpose of determining the horizontal position, being arranged on the magazine.
- 15 2. Storage assembly according to Claim 1, in which said reference means for determining the horizontal position comprise reference means which are arranged at a fixed, uniform distance with respect to the position-establishing means on the base plate.
3. Storage assembly according to Claim 2, in which said reference
20 means for determining the horizontal position comprise openings (21) in the base, which openings have a diameter of less than 2 mm.
4. Storage assembly according to one of the preceding claims, in which said reference means for determining the horizontal position
comprise auxiliary reference means (20) and main reference means (21),
25 which are arranged at a fixed distance with respect to one another, the field of the auxiliary reference means which can be detected by the sensor means (13-15) corresponding to the maximum expected deviation between head and magazine.
5. Storage assembly according to Claim 4, in which the said
30 auxiliary reference means (20) comprise an opening in the base plate, which opening has a diameter of less than 7 mm.
6. Storage assembly according to one of the preceding claims, in which said sensor means (13-15) comprise light-sensitive sensor means.
7. Storage assembly according to one of the preceding claims,
35 comprising a control unit (22) for regulating the movement of said head, to which the signal emanating from the sensor means is fed.
8. Storage assembly according to Claim 7 in combination with Claim 4, in which said control means (22) are designed to process the signal

received from the sensor means after meeting the auxiliary reference means in such a manner that the head including sensor means is then moved to a desired position with respect to the main sensor means.

9. Storage assembly according to one of the preceding claims, in
5 which the device (2) comprises a swivelling pivot-arm structure which is provided at the free end with said head (18).

fig-1



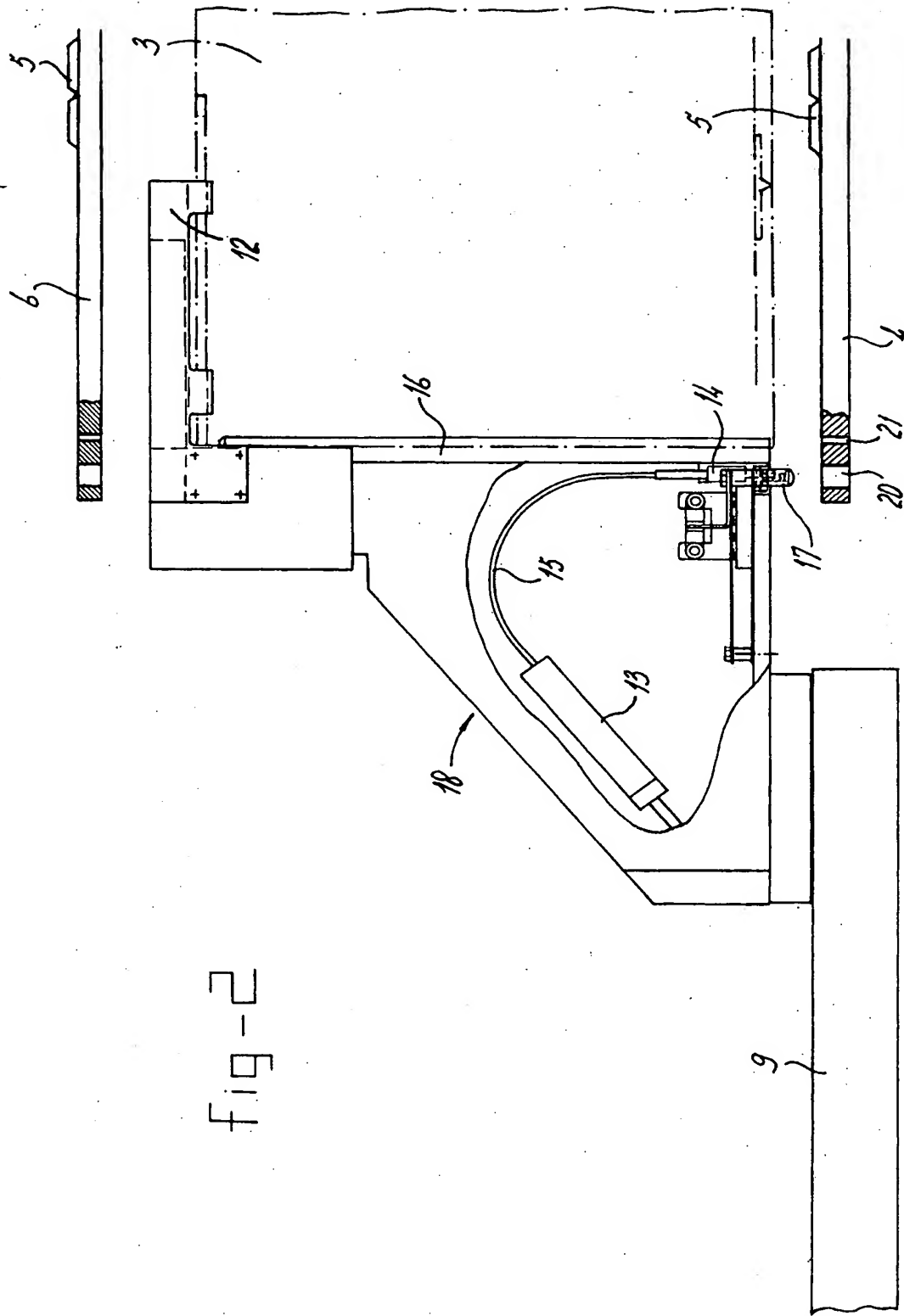


fig-2

INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT

International Application No
PCT/NL 98/00383

A. CLASSIFICATION OF SUBJECT MATTER

IPC 6 H01L21/00

According to International Patent Classification (IPC) or to both national classification and IPC

B. FIELDS SEARCHED

Minimum documentation searched (classification system followed by classification symbols)

IPC 6 H01L

Documentation searched other than minimum documentation to the extent that such documents are included in the fields searched

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C. DOCUMENTS CONSIDERED TO BE RELEVANT

Category *	Citation of document, with indication, where appropriate, of the relevant passages	Relevant to claim No.
A	GB 2 199 022 A (SHIMIZU CONSTRUCTION CO LTD) 29 June 1988 see page 15, line 1 - page 17, line 9; figures 4,5 ---	1,9
A	EP 0 506 045 A (TOKYO ELECTRON LIMITED) 30 September 1992 see column 4, line 28 - column 5, line 36; figures 3,9 ---	1,6
A	EP 0 435 338 A (EBARA CORPORATION) 3 July 1991 see the whole document -----	1

☐ Further documents are listed in the continuation of box C.

☒ Patent family members are listed in annex.

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Date of the actual completion of the international search

9 October 1998

Date of mailing of the international search report

16/10/1998

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